

The Gift

On Sunday, we continued digging deeper into the meaning of the Biblical Christmas story.

1. Warm-up Question: What do you want for Christmas this year?
2. Christmas is about giving – always has been. God got the ball rolling by giving us the gift of Jesus on the first Christmas. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, God gave God’s only begotten son. . . .” Isaiah 9:6 says, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. . . .” Jeff invited us to ponder how the decision to “give” Jesus to the world was made in heaven.
 - a. How do you envision this unfolding in heaven? Where did the idea come from? How did Jesus feel about it? How did God feel about it?
 - b. Jeff gave the analogy of a son telling his parents he felt called to become a missionary in a dangerous location. Do you think that captures the dynamic between Jesus and God? Why or why not?
3. Read Philippians 2:4-11.
 - a. Verse 6 describes Jesus living in heaven before his earthly birth. It says he was in the form of God and equal to God. What do you envision that existence being like for Jesus? Describe it.
 - b. Verse 7 says Jesus “emptied himself . . . being born in human likeness.” What does that mean? What did he give up in order to be become a human?
 - c. Verse 8 says Jesus even accepted a humiliating death on the cross. When Jesus was dying, do you think he had any second thoughts about his choice to leave heaven to become human?
 - d. Because of what Jesus did – giving up everything to come rescue us – God has now “given him a name above every name” and made him Lord of all. What are we supposed to learn from that?
 - e. Verse 5 says, “Let the same mine be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” What does that mean?
4. Luke 6 (and Matthew 5) record the Beatitudes of Jesus, a series of short pithy sayings like, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,” and “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled.” The Greek word translated as “blessed” is *makarios* (mak-AR-ee-os), which meant “the bliss of the gods.” So, through his teachings in Luke 6, Jesus was trying to teach us how to experience the same kind of joy as Jesus did – divine bliss. It’s in that context that Jesus speaks the words of Luke 6:31-38. Read that passage now; the text is found on p. 3.

- a. What sentence, phrase, or thought in this passage most grabs you – and why?
 - b. What does it mean to “give away your life” in the way verse 38 suggests?
 - c. Re-read verse 38 from the Message Bible and from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (both on p. 3). How would you summarize the message of verse 38 in your own words?
5. Jeff said, “When we make generosity the central organizing principle of our life, we discover true riches.” Let’s think about how this might apply to each of us.
- a. Generosity is a holistic concept that affects every aspect of life – our time, energy, love, praise, opportunities, career, money, etc. In what part of life do you sense Jesus calling you to be more generous? What might that look like?
 - b. The implication of all Jesus says is that giving is what makes us truly happy. Do you buy that? If so, what is it about giving that generates so much happiness?
 - c. Suppose you were given the choice between two kinds of life and you had to choose. Option 1 = You will inherit great wealth and be able to do anything money can buy your entire life. Option 2 = You will have little material wealth, but make a powerful positive difference in the life of many people. (Note: Wealth and helping others are not always mutually exclusive. But for purposes of this thought exercise, let’s assume that they are.) All things considered, which choice of these two choices would make you happier? Which choice would you make?
6. At the end of his sermon, Jeff showed a video where a lonely man faced several pivotal choices.
- a. When the man sees the stray dog, what thoughts were probably running through his mind? What do you think caused him to decide to try to help the dog?
 - b. When the man took the dog home and began bonding with her, what do you think he thought and felt?
 - c. When the man saw the homemade sign about the lost dog, what do you think he thought and felt? Why do you think he decided to contact the owners?
 - d. When he said goodbye to the dog, how do you think he felt?
 - e. At the end of the video, do you think all he had gone through was worth it? Why or why not?
 - f. Does this story remind you of anything you’ve experienced in your life?

Join us on Sunday to help us meet and exceed our 300 attendance goal! We need you!

Luke 6:31-38 (The Message Bible)

³¹⁻³⁴ “Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for *them*! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that’s charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

³⁵⁻³⁶ “I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way God lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst. God is kind; you be kind.

³⁷ “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don’t condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier.

³⁸ Give away your life; you’ll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

Luke 6:38 (NRSV)

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”